

Although researchers and scientists have uncovered some of the most effective means of preventing the contraction of this destructive disease, today, more people than ever are living with HIV/AIDS. According to UNAIDS, a Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, an additional 4.3 million people contracted HIV in 2006, a little over half a million of whom were children under the age of 15. There are more than 13 million African children who have been orphaned due to this pandemic and in sub-Saharan Africa, 25% of all children are AIDS-related orphans. In Ethiopia, the second most populous African nation, 11% of all children are orphaned due to AIDS and 6% of the country's entire population, approximately 4.5 million people, is infected with the disease.

As Chair of the Congressional Ethiopia and Ethiopian American Caucus, one of my primary priorities is assisting the efforts of the Diaspora communities. Supporting, organizing, and contributing to the development and management of their healthcare resources and prevention programs has been an ongoing goal of the caucus. In 2005, I had the privilege of traveling with the Ethiopian North American Health Professionals Association (ENAHPA). I have seen first-hand the cultural, political, and economic impact the HIV/AIDS epidemic has had on the people of Ethiopia. Thanks to efforts made by ENAHPA, many people are now receiving the critical healthcare they need, but millions more still lack adequate access.

Here at home, the struggle against AIDS also continues. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates about 1 million people in the U.S. are living with HIV/AIDS, approximately one quarter of whom do not know that they are infected. Despite stereotypes depicting Asian Pacific Islander Americans (APIAs) as a "model minority" who enjoy perfect health, advocates argue that HIV/AIDS awareness is lacking in many APIA communities. According to the Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center and the CDC, from 2000-2003, the number of diagnosed APIA AIDS cases grew by 54%. As of 2005, men accounted for 78% of all APIA AIDS cases, 71% occurring among men who engaged in same-sex relations. Among APIA women, 80% of AIDS cases were attributed to high-risk heterosexual contact. The Asian and Pacific Islander Wellness Center cites the negative stigma and discrimination related to HIV/AIDS within the APIA community and cultural and language barriers as some of the most significant obstacles hindering effective prevention and outreach efforts.

To combat these issues, I have made combating healthcare disparities a top priority for the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. I have also consistently supported efforts to increase funding levels for AIDS research, using my position on the Appropriations Committee to seek necessary funding for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and the GlobalFund for AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. I joined my Colleagues Barbara Lee (CA-09) and Frank Pallone (NJ-06) in requesting \$35 million in the Fiscal Year 2008 Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill to support vaccine trials and research through the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI).

Now more than ever, the U.S. should be the leader in the national and international effort to combat this deadly pandemic. I want to thank my colleagues who have joined me in working

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hard to raise the issue of AIDS in the consciousness of Congress. On behalf of the millions of people who live with HIV/AIDS, to their family and friends, I want acknowledge the dire crisis we are in and raise awareness for the need to eradicate this deadly and preventable disease.